

KA
JINGSNENG TYMMEN
PART I

by
Radhon Singh Berry

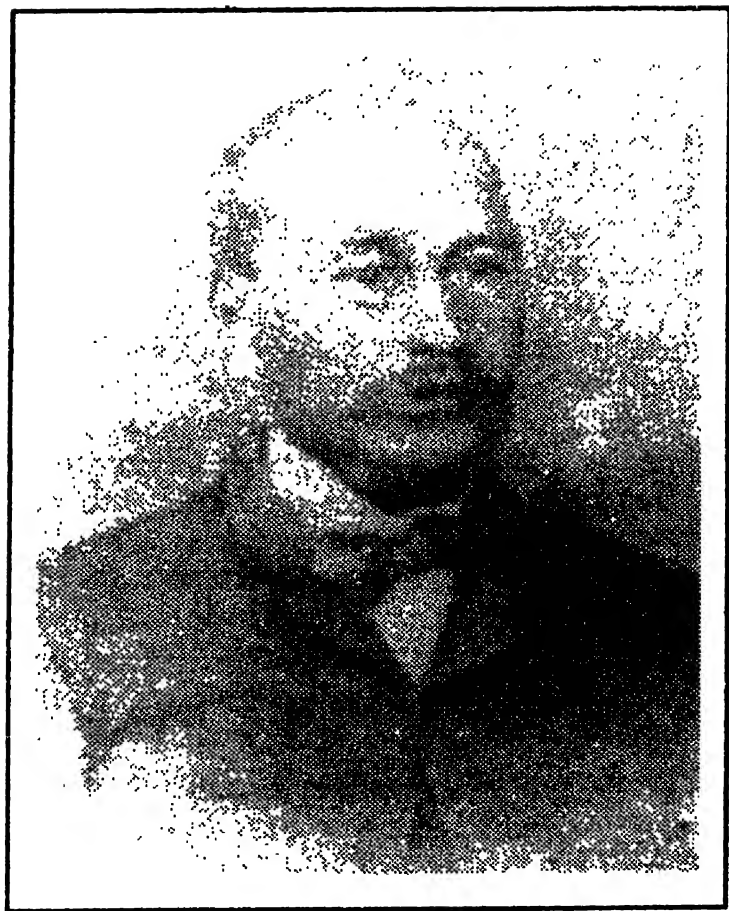
(a translation)
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About the Author and His work

Radhon Singh Berry Kharwanlang was born in Mawmluh (near Cherrapunjee) around 1850. His personal life is relatively unknown as none of the usual details of his childhood, education and profession were ever recorded. Brief references are made by his biographers of his two marriages and five children, two from the earlier union and three from the latter.

Radhon Singh Berry is remembered and famous for his commendable literary achievements. He was, along with ~~Jeebon~~ Singh Suka and Jeebon Roy Mairom, responsible for perfecting the written Khasi language. After the British missionaries had introduced the Roman alphabet in 1841 he kept the pronunciation intact and completed the alphabet by adding the letters ñ and ng and dropping the letters c, z, f, v, x and q. There are now 23 letters in the Khasi alphabet a, b, k, d, e, g, ng, h, i, ÿ, j, l, m, n, ñ, o, p, r, s, t, u, w, y. Before this development ours was a purely oral tradition and important documents were recorded in the Bengali script. In April 1899 Jeebon Roy published the first Khasi Reader "Ka Kitab Pule Nyngkong" in which he and Radhon Singh Berry introduced the complete alphabet and correct spellings for the first time ever.

Radhon Singh Berry's masterpiece is, without doubt, "Ka Jingsneng Tymmen", his compilation of the Khasi moral code and rules of etiquette. The Khasis believe that there is a divine covenant made between them and the Almighty that we come into this world to earn and propagate righteousness, to live in society according to the divine commandments and to work for its benefit, to venerate our ancestors and respect our

elders, our kith and kin and cherish all God's creations, to worship God and God alone. Righteous living leads to inner and outer harmony and consequently to the well-being of one and all. "Ka Jingsneng Tymmen" encapsules the essence of the Khasi philosophy of life.

Radhon Singh Berry delves into the deep recesses of the human mind and guides one step by step through the seemingly simple path of day to day living. ~~It~~ details the way one should eat, sit, speak, attire; the advantages of early rising and industriousness; the importance of abstinence from drugs and drinks; the evil of greed, envy and overindulgence; how to behave while travelling, visiting people and mixing with the opposite sex; how, why, and when one should respect Man, revere our ancestors and worship our Creator. All this and much much more.

'Ka Jingsneng Tymmen' was first published in "U Khasi Mynta" in February 1897. It had a hundred and twelve lines. In March 1897 he added another ninety two lines. In December 1902 Part I was published in book form by Jeebon Roy at the Ri Khasi Press. The following year Book II was also published. It was written in the typically Khasi 'phawar' (ballad) style: two lines consisting of ten syllables rhyming perfectly throughout. Book I has forty one stanzas and Book II has sixty eight stanzas.

Radhon Singh Berry was a sensitive and reflective man. He also wrote beautiful songs for the Brahmo Samaj, the Seng Khasi and the Unitarians. He was a progressive man in thought and spirit. He was born a Khasi who practised the traditional religion. Later he studied Christianity for a few years, reverted

back to the Khasi religion and eventually, along with Hajom Kissor Singh, founded his own, "Ka Niam Wei Blei". Later when the foreign Unitarian missionaries came to the Khasi Hills he found an affinity with their religious beliefs and merged with them.

Radhon Singh Berry died when he was just a little over fifty years old. He was at that time involved in compiling the English-Khasi Dictionary.

Bijoya Sawian.

INTRODUCTION

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Ki Hynniew Trep literally means The Seven Huts. According to a popular legend of the Khasi-Pnars there was a time when all the fourteen families, dwelt in heaven. People used to descend daily by the *jingkieng ksiar* (which literally means the 'golden ladder' but is actually meant to refer to a celestial pathway connecting heaven and earth) to come down to earth and cultivate. This continued until one day it was irretrievably destroyed. The seven families or Seven Huts who were on earth thus remained here forever and from them the race multiplied.

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Anthropologists do believe that the Khasis are the remnants of the first Mongolian overflow from the traditional cradle of the Indo-Chinese race and that they established themselves in their present habitat at a very remote period. Their language is the only surviving dialect of the Mon Khmer group of languages. There is a distinct similarity between the Khasi language and the Mon Khmer-Palaung dialects prevailing in Burma and Indo-China. Racially, the Khasis are very akin to the Indo-Chinese tribes but are by no means pure Mongoloid. At some early period they must have intermarried with an-

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The Khasi Pnars believe in God who is Omnipotent, Omnipresent and Omniscient. Accordingly they hold it a sacrilege to symbolise Him or picture Him in any shape or form. God's three commandment are:

- 1) *Kamai ia ka Hok* which literally means - "earn righteousness". The import of this commandment is the primacy of the righteous life which *Ki Hynniew Trep* and their descendants should live throughout their lives on earth. To live a righteous life man must not only speak the truth and act fairly and justly in all his dealing with his fellow men but should also be honest in his thoughts and wishes.
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- 3) Tip-Kur Tip Kha means “know one’s maternal relations and paternal relations”. The import of this commandment is seen in the social structure of the Khasi-Pnars.

Ki Hynniew Trep take descent from the mother. The children take her surname/clan name. All those who descend from the First Ancestress, “Ka Iawbei” form one composite ‘Kur’ - clan. Marriage between members of the same clan is an unforgivable sin and those who fall are outcasted.

There is no curse which we dread more than that which makes his clan extinct. We consider it God’s greatest blessing when the tribe and clan increases. So in our matrilineal society, contrary to the mistaken, idea of outsiders that women rule, a man is doubly honoured.

In his sister’s home he is ‘U Kñi ha ka iap ha ka im’ (an uncle in life and death) for he advises and protects. Although the youngest daughter is the custodian of the family property, she can make no decision regarding property and other major issues without the consent of her maternal uncles. In his wife’s house he is ‘U Kpa uba lah ba ñai’ (a father who is able and steadfast). He is the progenitor, God’s instrument to increase his tribe and the clan of his wife and prevent it from extinction.

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The pity is that in the colonial days the westerners puffed up by their power and authority looked down upon the subject races as inferior being uncivilized and uncultured. It was much more so in the case of the natives of the Hills who were ignorant of the three R's having no written history or literature, disdaining to learn their oral literature which they dismissed as mere myths and legends of unlettered people dominated by superstition and fear of the unknown. If they had deigned to come down from their high horse to study the tales and traditions of the people, their culture, customs, institutions and noble concept of God-Man relationship, they would have been blessed with the joy of knowing their innate truthfulness, tolerance, goodness and pleasant disposition, glimpses of which shine through the pages of *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen*.

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XV

Whenever you visit your friends and relations,
Before you enter their house, at the entrance
Remember to always wipe your feet clean,
Then inquire if they're out or if they're in;
If they're at home let them welcome you first,
Then enter to discuss your work or converse;
If something, indoors, your way does hinder,
Don't just cross over or brush it asunder;
Pick up with your hands and move it aside,
Place it somewhere where you think it right;
Then proceed and sit in the drawing room,
Don't rush for the fireside too soon;
If you're feeling cold and warmth you do need,
Go ahead but, the hearth, don't touch with your feet.



XVI

When your host offers to serve you something to eat,
Don't say 'yes' too soon, hold back then accede,
When you partake fruit or whatever food,
When you eat, you drink, behave as you should;
Don't drop and litter and dirty the place,
If you do then remove every crumb, every trace;
In the garbage dump outside you throw
And wash all your used utensils also;
Then bring them back all clean and dried,
Put them in their place or somewhere aside.



XVII

When you visit anyone don't overstay,
Niangbulot* they'll call you and wish you away;
Wherever you go, wherever you are,
Your work and your home do always remember;
When you're ready to take your leave and depart,
Put your chair back where it was in the start;
If seated on the floor or mat or sheet,
That too you roll up and smoothen it neat;
From the time you come and the time you leave,
Don't let any faults your hostess perceive;

** a kind of beetle that is very difficult to get rid of*

XVIII

Before you sit down anywhere,
First, with your hands, do feel with care;
Don't casually sit without doing so,
You may get dirty, get embarrassed too;
And when your visit you're ready to end,
Tell your host, your hostess of your intent;
Don't suddenly leave as if you're sulking,
It's extremely ill mannered, it's insulting.

XIX

When at night, from the house, you go and come,
Quietly close the door do not bang and thump;
With your back turned do not close it either,
It's wrong, incorrect, it's unnatural behaviour;*
Always pay heed to words of advice,
Adhere to Truth whatever betides;
Also abide by what's morally excellent,
Ne'er feel you're above admonishment;
Don't get habituated to making excuses
For your wrong doings lest the habit increases;
Too much light talk and banter do shun,
It weakens Truth, it upsets its foundation.

**like ghosts and spirits.*

XX

Do not abruptly kindle the fire,
In case it harms those sitting near;
Never ever spit just anywhere,
In case it falls on someone there;
Dirty water, too, take care when you throw,
For it might splash on some one too;
If it does so by mistake,
Wash off with water and apologies make;
Mixing too freely is never correct,
You cheapen yourself, lose your self-respect;
Don't gallivant and visit at random,
You'll be looked down upon by everyone.

XXI

In too much horseplay do not indulge
For your mind will not develop much;
To the minimum keep jest and banter,
Or your life won't ripen, your mind won't flower;
By music don't get too influenced,
For your energy will all get spent;
In laughter do always know the limit
Or you'll be likened to the goat who threw a fit;*
On song and dance-again I'll echo-
Waste not too much time for your mind will be shallow;
All that's superficial should make no impact,
Always look beyond what glitters on top.

** referring to the tale of the goat who on seeing the tiger shook uncontrollably.*

XXII

Never butt into conversation with useless chatter,
Do not indulge in malicious banter;
Don't do anything without understanding,
You'll expose yourself, your way of thinking;
Don't accustom yourself to lowly talk,
People will point at you wherever you walk;
Don't abuse and curse and castigate,
For, your own reputation, you will unmake;
Taking oaths and vowing you must avoid
For it's a sin in front of God.

XXIII

Scandals and embarrassing stories conceal,
Even if they're true do not reveal;
Shameful actions avoid for it isn't right
To carry them out in the dark or the light;
Don't be stubborn in what you do and say,
For your nature will be led astray;
Don't make it a habit to gossip and slander,
For it'll take root in your character;
Be not temperamental in your actions and words,
For your discipline and etiquette will be destroyed.



XXIV

Don't sulk and be moody without any cause,
All good intentions and aims will surely be lost;
Don't be irritable and easily ired,
You'll make enemies wherever you are;
Be gentle and helpful, good-natured and kind,
Others will pay you back some time;
In word and deed don't be in a hurry,
Everything goes wrong and topsy turvy;
In whatever you do, whatever you think,
Be not in a rush for you'll suffer and sink.



XXV

Do not be cantankerous and envious too,
The nape of your neck will surely be hollow;*
Waste not your time longing for others' fortune,
You'll wreck your life and your ambition ruin;
Do not be jealous of other people,
Lest it recoils on you, it's not impossible;
Too tight-fisted too, please do not be,
You just might spoil your destiny;
At others, with an evil eye, don't glance,
One day, you too, may suffer such chance;
When friends and relations are in trouble and pain
Spare not yourself to help with might and main.

** Popular belief is that ill-natured people have hollow napes.*

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To fishing and angling don't be addicted too much,
You may get your curry but substantial food not;*
Don't be too fond of trapping birds,
Time will be wasted, clothes will be tattered;**
Don't get habituated to searching for honey,
Dangerous places you'll chance upon, unwary;
Don't get too used to hunting wild game,
You may lose your friends and your good name;
Such pastimes as frequenting the hills and dales.
Such pastimes no one will ever regale;
For women and children you will surely frighten,
For they'll see you wherever they go and they wend;
By bad manners, bad habits do not get destroyed
And shame and vice do always avoid.

** Since the habit is bound to make one neglect one's work and become a bad provider.*

*** Because one will be venturing into thorny bushes.*

XXVII

Alcohol, you shouldn't too much desire,
It has, in it, both fire and water;
Do not ever take these words lightly,
Alcohol does harm you eventually;
Smoking hashish too do not dare,
Impoverished you'll be, for your life you won't care;
As for opium and other stronger drugs,
They'll shorten your life if, in them, you indulge;
From gambling also you should stay far,
Or like a bottomless pit it will you devour;
Keep away from women of bad character,
Or your health and wealth will disappear.
With the opposite sex do not mix without thought.
In adultery, incest you may get involved;
Your reputation will then be sullied and ruined,
To-day, tomorrow and for the years to come.

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Your nature should always be moderate,
In your actions and thoughts be temperate;
Do not a life without discipline lead
And let your mind go to seed;
With whatever is not in Truth rooted,
Do not get used or habituated;
Even if it's as sweet as honey,
Avoid it, dodge it and faraway be;
If you go near Evil you will get spoiled,
E'en if you are pure you will get soiled.

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Do not get married without informing
Your father, your uncle, your kith and kin;
Don't marry into families which are suspect,
Choose someone who's equal in every respect;
Otherwise the world will criticize your action,
Sacrilege once committed keeps on re-occurring;
Once you acquire your in-laws and spouse,
Plan how you'll run your life and your house;
In your speech and action always be proper,
Well-being will be with you forever and ever.



XXX

Marrying those forbidden by custom don't dare,
It's a sacrilege beyond compare;
Intimately don't mix with close relations,
For you just might to temptation succumb;
You just might commit a heinous crime
And your reputation will be begrimed;
Do not cheat and let down anyone,
It becomes a habit and causes your ruin;
Do not ever covet someone else's spouse,
Such a sin will bring the fall of your house;
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For you'll suffer from guilt and misery;
Do not ever kill and take others' lives,
Capital punishment you'll face and cannot survive;
It's also a crime, a most ghastly sin,
Whether it's known, whether it's hidden;
All these transgressions don't end on this earth,
All these trespasses you'll have to answer to God.



XV

Whenever you visit your friends and relations,
Before you enter their house, at the entrance
Remember to always wipe your feet clean,
Then inquire if they're out or if they're in;
If they're at home let them welcome you first,
Then enter to discuss your work or converse;
If something, indoors, your way does hinder,
Don't just cross over or brush it asunder;
Pick up with your hands and move it aside,
Place it somewhere where you think it right;
Then proceed and sit in the drawing room,
Don't rush for the fireside too soon;
If you're feeling cold and warmth you do need,
Go ahead but, the hearth, don't touch with your feet.

XVI

When your host offers to serve you something to eat,
Don't say 'yes' too soon, hold back then accede,
When you partake fruit or whatever food,
When you eat, you drink, behave as you should;
Don't drop and litter and dirty the place,
If you do then remove every crumb, every trace;
In the garbage dump outside you throw
And wash all your used utensils also;
Then bring them back all clean and dried,
Put them in their place or somewhere aside.

XVII

When you visit anyone don't overstay,
Niangbulot* they'll call you and wish you away;
Wherever you go, wherever you are,
Your work and your home do always remember;
When you're ready to take your leave and depart,
Put your chair back where it was in the start;
If seated on the floor or mat or sheet,
That too you roll up and smoothen it neat;
From the time you come and the time you leave,
Don't let any faults your hostess perceive;

** a kind of beetle that is very difficult to get rid of*

XVIII

Before you sit down anywhere,
First, with your hands, do feel with care;
Don't casually sit without doing so,
You may get dirty, get embarrassed too;
And when your visit you're ready to end,
Tell your host, your hostess of your intent;
Don't suddenly leave as if you're sulking,
It's extremely ill mannered, it's insulting.

XIX

When at night, from the house, you go and come,
Quietly close the door do not bang and thump;
With your back turned do not close it either,
It's wrong, incorrect, it's unnatural behaviour;*
Always pay heed to words of advice,
Adhere to Truth whatever betides;
Also abide by what's morally excellent,
Ne'er feel you're above admonishment;
Don't get habituated to making excuses
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It's also a crime, a most ghastly sin,
Whether it's known, whether it's hidden;
All these transgressions don't end on this earth,
All these trespasses you'll have to answer to God.



XXXI

Mean well, speak the truth and to righteousness adhere,
Life whether long or short should have its aura;
Love yourself and others you must respect,
You'll gain peace on earth and in the hereafter as well;
Never be careless in work and action,
What you say and do, carry out to perfection;
Be adept and skilful in everything too,
Be thorough in whatever you say, whatever you do;
As you grow, blossom and gradually flower,
Keep on improving in your work and labour;
When you're asked to go on work somewhere,
Don't try to avoid and your duty defer;
Wherever you go, whatever you do,
Unto thyself always be true.

XXXII

Always conduct yourself with propriety,
Never be arrogant, never be cocky;
With your kith and kin with deference speak.
Show no pride, to your townfolk and community;
With senseless fights and arguments
Don't get involved lest you lament;
On those who are poor and destitute,
On them don't look down and never be rude;
If ever misfortune on others befall,
Ne'er say 'serves them right' whether they're right or they're
wrong;
Whatever it is, always keep in mind,
It can happen to you too any time;
In life, whatever you do, either good or bad,
Whatever it may be, to you it comes back.

XXXIII

Always with discretion talk and act,
It's an investment that remains intact;
Do not overspend and your earnings deplete,
In drink and food, too, be discreet;
An extravagant life leads to penury,
You'll die alone without people and money;
Do not interfere in other's lives,
It does no good, trouble multiplies;

Concentrate on a life that's good and true,
Good fortune will always be with you;
Never be too inquisitive and too prying,
Never meddle and be too interfering;
Always keep your innocent hearts pure as a pearl.
All ye budding youths, ye boys and girls.



XXXIV

Don't always pamper your whims and fancies,
Detrimental to you are such tendencies;
Indulgences encourage only sin and vice,
They trample on all limits, taboos, advice;
Even to the children of the well-to-do,
Such habits will bring only sorrow and woe;
Even to children born into wealth,
They'll destroy their character and their health;
Be careful, be wary, stick to what is correct,
In matters about how one's life is conducted;
My children, my nephews don't succumb to desire,
God will assist you, so will all your ancestors.



XXXV

Whatever you know whatever you gain,
It's useless if not by Truth sustained;
Even if very rich you become,
If no one respects you what use is the pomp ?
Even if you are very grandly attired,
It's useless for it's only your shame camouflaged;
You may reach the top, sit on horse, elephant,
If your reputation is sullied what use is it then?
Even if you worship with folded hands,
What use is it if you're not honest and kind?
Even if you worship God and Him entreat,
If, within you, goodness is not rooted deep,
Even if you're famous and wellknown worldwide,
If God you don't worship and revere inside,
How long will you escape His wrath, His judgement?
Today or tomorrow you'll come to a sad end;
How long can you escape the scoffing of the world
Hounding you from all around?



XXXVI

All superficial pomp and ostentation
Undermines Truth and is the root of destruction;
Once your character is destroyed,
Whatever you achieve, no one will applaud;
Well-being is assured if by Truth you abide,
Right from the beginning to the end of your life;
Friends, acquaintances and all at home,
Do no wrong deeds wherever you roam;
Don't get ensnared by wicked people,
Be alert, be wary and set an example;
So that you'll always be at one with God,
From now on please remember my words.



XXXVII

Do not get stuck to a porter's job,
It'll get you down, your neck and all;*
Don't get too used to a labourer's toil,
You'll become foolish and your intellect spoil;
Don't beg for food from others' homes,
Self respect and your halo you will lose;
Don't forever get enslaved and in people's homes serve,
Your progeny will gain no respect, no regard;
Do not neglect farming, cultivate your land,
Your property and capital will multiply;
Concentrate on skills that involve your hands,
Your life will be enriched and your mind enhanced.

** Because of heavy loads.*



XXXVIII

Learn to trade and do some business
All of you from North, South, East and West;
Even if capital is a little less,
If you persevere you will progress;
If you work hard it'll always pay,
You'll never run short of food on your plate;
If you shirk work and become lazy,
On yourself you'll inflict woe and penury;
Learn to keep your accounts always straight,
Keep your mind clear when you're asleep or awake;
Also learn from people who come from outside
How to deal with what is wrong and what is right;
Arrange your thoughts, think and ponder,
You will then do well, you will then prosper.



XXXIX

Don't leave people behind when you travel together,
Go and come in company whether from near or far;
If some misfortune occurs on the way,
Render help and service without delay;
All your good manners do not forget,
Your name will be praised your deeds emulated;
God and Man will also give you their blessings.
Your name will always remain bright and shining;
E'en after you're gone they'll tell stories of you
And the deeds you've done so good and true.



XL

The best etiquette if followed fully,
Binds you to your clan and father's family;
The best behaviour will always bring
Many benefits and many a blessing;
Don't take this lightly and dismiss these words,
My children, instruction, never avoid;
Spread and remember my teachings forever,
So you may live civilly amongst each other;
If our children, grandchildren are strong and good,
Parents glow and thrive and in joy exalt;
If, however, the opposite should ever happen,
It'll harm the parents, their fate, their well-being.



XLI

Remember, of God you must think all the time,
He's our Protector, our Guide, the Giver of strength;
If Him you worship your halo will glow,
Whatever you do, wherever you go;
Your personality will always be bright,
Whether male or female you'll always look right;
Your clansmen too will shine and glitter,
Your kith and kin will increase and prosper,
Night and day, God you must always adore,
He who created all our ancestors;
He who makes the generations to come,
Him you must worship and to him bow down;
This is the dharam* of the body and soul,
Dear children, this eternal truth is from days of old;
To this 'dharam' adhere and always hold fast,
From now on and until the last;
Bow down your head, fold your hands, venerate,
God will stand by you in the light and the shade;
God bless you all, grow, blossom, prosper,
God bless you boys and girls hereafter.



** rules that govern.*

CONCLUSION

O! Wondrous Khasi Culture,
Where are you now?
In the peoples' hearts and souls,
Or where you are listened to no more?

